

THE BERLIN SITUATIONTOP SECRETA. Contingency Planning

SIR GEORGE MILLS said that a number of contingency plans which had been commissioned by General Norstad or the Ambassadorial Group would soon be ready for national consideration. It would be most important that these plans should be viewed in the right light. The basic tenet of United States thinking was that the Soviet Union would not be prepared to go to the lengths of nuclear war. The object of United States policy was accordingly to convince the Russians that if Western vital interests were in jeopardy we would resort to all-out nuclear warfare; at the same time the Russians should not be so inexorably engaged initially that they could not compromise or withdraw without an unacceptable loss of face. It was these considerations which had led the Americans to propose a catalogue of plans of an increasingly aggressive nature designed at each stage to convince the Russians that they were really running the risk of all-out war. In these circumstances it would be futile to comment on the plans in a strictly military context since it was fundamental that they involved the risk of nuclear war and had psychological rather than strictly military objectives.

In discussion the following points were made:-

- (a) Whilst the above considerations would undoubtedly have to be borne in mind and whilst the United States "catalogue" concept was fully realised it was important that it should also be clearly understood that there was another point of view. The United States concept took no account of Russian reactions to the various measures and there was no guarantee that these would not involve a chain reaction and subsequent loss of control. It would moreover be folly to ignore completely the military feasibility of the various measures since we might very soon find that Russian countermeasures would place us at a serious military disadvantage; this could not but jeopardise the psychological or political credibility of the various measures.
- (b) Whilst action against the Russians in the maritime sphere might appear superficially to be attractive, such measures were, in fact subject to serious disadvantages as a means of bringing the pressure to bear upon the Russians. The latter would be largely invulnerable to a blockade, whilst the West would suffer severe economic dislocation; the neutral nations would be alienated; and since we could not, short of all-out war, attack the Russian submarine bases, we should face the prospect of war at sea at a severe and sustained military disadvantage. The Committee had agreed that the report of the Blockade Working Group should be discussed in the Ambassadorial Group but only to avoid an accusation that we were once more dragging our feet and because there was a chance of demonstrating the futility of a naval blockade.

THE COMMITTEE:-

- (1) Took note.

From: COS (61)-⁶⁵ Sept 27, 1961

1. Attacks on Ground Installations

Sir George Mills referred to General Norstad's request⁺ for delegated authority to attack those ground targets, excluding airfields, in or near the air corridors specifically identified in the act of firing at Allied aircraft. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were in favour of granting this delegated authority whilst hitherto France and the United Kingdom had opposed it. The Ambassadorial Group was at that moment discussing the Foreign Secretary's alternative proposal whereby, rather than immediate retaliatory action, the Russians would be warned following an attack on a transport aircraft that if such attacks persisted an attack would be launched against a Russian site. In the United States view immediate retaliatory action would be likely to have a very much greater impact upon the Russians; Western passivity, in the face of Russian provocation of this nature, could only be interpreted by them as a sign of weakness. A premeditated punitive attack sometime after an incident would furthermore, in their view, involve considerably greater dangers of escalation. It was clear that Her Majesty's Government could not accept General Norstad's proposal unless adequate safeguards against unjustified or misdirected retaliatory action could be devised. The Americans, however, could not understand our present attitude and he believed that the position of Her Majesty's Government would in no way be prejudiced if General Norstad were instructed to make proposals as to the safeguards he would embody in his instructions to pilots. The question of delegated authority could then be considered again in the light of these specific proposals.

In discussion the following point was made:-

- (c) There was general agreement that immediate retaliatory action would be less likely to lead to escalation than a deliberate punitive operation and that accordingly General Norstad should be asked to make detailed proposals regarding safeguards. The Committee's previous objections were based on the difficulty of identifying the particular site engaging our aircraft and the uncertainty that the Russians were in fact "shooting to kill"; the case of AA practices such as had occurred during the Berlin airlift would have to be covered. General Norstad's proposal would have to be subjected to careful scrutiny when received and it would in particular be vital to ensure that immediate retaliatory action should only be directed against "offending" sites.

THE COMMITTEE:-

- (2) Agreed with the views of the Chairman, British Defence Staffs Washington, subject to the point made in discussion.
- (3) Took note that the Chief of the Defence Staff would seek the approval of the Minister of Defence.

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, S.W.1.

28TH SEPTEMBER, 1961.